

Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association

March 11, 2010

Senator Harp, Rep. Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the appropriation to provide assistance and access to schools of veterinary medicine. We know that Governor Rell is looking at suspending these funds as part of her deficit mitigation plan. The Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association greatly appreciates the support of the legislature for veterinary education for Connecticut residents and asks that you keep this funding intact. The University of Connecticut, in agreement with the Department of Higher Education, negotiated bids from veterinary schools for seats for Connecticut residents and chose Iowa State University. Currently there are 5 sophomores and 4 freshmen participating in this program at the Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine. We believe that there would have been more than 4 freshmen but that number was affected by an inability to advertise the availability of funding within the timeframe of the normal application process because of the timing of budget allocations. This year Iowa State received 43 applications from Connecticut residents and has offered positions to 15 of those students. While only 5 will be funded by the Connecticut program, there were a high number of positions offered because Iowa basically considers all of the Connecticut applicants as if they were instate students because of the Connecticut funding program. As you know, prior to this we were only one of 3 states with no veterinary school or contracted seats. The difficulty this poses is illustrated by Colorado State's Veterinary School where acceptance to applicant ratios are 1:3 for residents, 1:4 for contract seats, and 1:33 for out of state applicants. This bill has truly improved the chances for some of our residents to pursue this career.

Your support is requested to continue to fully fund this program. To keep the program growing and meaningful, this means an additional \$100,000 per class until we have a full roster of 5 Connecticut residents in each veterinary class, which means a fully funded program starting in 2011 would require \$400,000 per year. This is important to keep this program growing and to support the students already enrolled.

We strongly believe that improved access to veterinary education is not only important to Connecticut residents who wish to pursue a career in this field, but also to all of the residents of Connecticut. The reasons this program is important:

To correct an inequity for our residents who wish to pursue this career.

Veterinarians are needed and in short supply in many sectors both in Connecticut and nationally such as:

Treatment of companion animals and livestock

Public health – veterinarians are on the forefront of fighting and researching zoonotic diseases that affect both animals and humans, such as West Nile, Avian Influenza, Lyme, Rabies, Mad Cow Disease, and Anthrax

Food Safety – veterinarians are an integral part of food inspection

Homeland security – as related to the food supply and infectious diseases and service dogs

Pharmaceutical industry – development of human and animal medicines

Academia – faculty and research

Federal and state government – USDA, military, public health service, CDC

Current numbers for Connecticut veterinarians give us concern for following the trend nationally for the predicted shortage of veterinarians, especially in the public health and food animal sectors. Recent survey results indicate a need for concern even in our companion animal medicine in Connecticut.

2007 CVMA survey:

Years to retirement: 281 responded (out of about 600 members)

A total of 37% in 10 years

Increasing to 55% in 15 years

Average time to fill any openings: 105 responded (practice owners)

29% > 1 year

60% > 6 months

Keep in mind that many practices feel that they don't have enough veterinarians and that previous estimates indicate a need for 25 veterinarians per year to fill current positions.

Students who establish residency in other states to get into school often do not return. The cost of out of state tuition results in loans in excess of \$150,000 for these students after 4 years of education. Therefore they are less likely to move to a state with a perception of a high cost of living. These contacted seats give us a greater likelihood of retaining these veterinarians.

We strongly urge you to support access to veterinary education for Connecticut residents.

Sincerely,

Eva Ceranowicz DVM and Robert Belden DVM

Co Chairs, Government Affairs Committee

Past Presidents, Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association